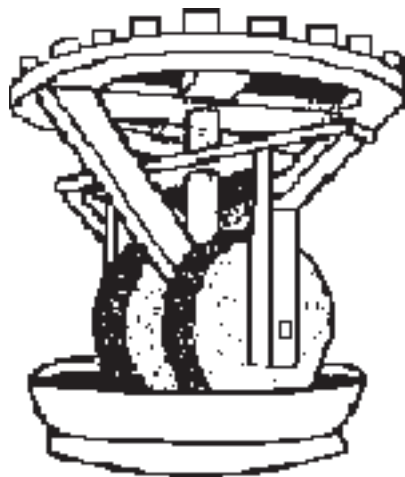


# Touchpaper

The Newsletter of the  
**WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS**  
**FRIENDS ASSOCIATION**

[a registered charity No. 1115237]



**JUNE**  
**2009**

## OFFICERS OF THE FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

### **Chairman:**

John Wright

1 Albury Ride

Cheshunt

tel: 01992 624210

Herts EN8 8XE



### **Secretary:**

Richard Penfold

10 Thaxted Way

Waltham Abbey

tel: 01992 712623

Essex EN9 1LQ



### **Treasurer:**

Daphne Clements

56 Park Road

Enfield

tel: 01992 717816

Middx EN3 6SR



ALL ENQUIRIES RELATING TO THIS NEWSLETTER  
SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO:-

**Malcolm Bergh**

**Touchpaper Editor**

3 Kingsley Avenue

Cheshunt

Herts EN8 9PU

tel: 01992 632941

e-mail: [MalcolmBergh@hotmail.com](mailto:MalcolmBergh@hotmail.com)



PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions to the  
next issue is 15th August 2009



## *Editorials*

*A good start to the season this year, with three major weekend events and visitor numbers on a par with last year. Considering the current economic circumstances, this is probably better than we could expect.*

*The AGM and Reunion held on the 8th May went well, although numbers were down again. If you have not renewed your membership you will receive a final reminder with this issue, so please renew if you have forgotten.*

*Finally, there has been no response so far to my request for a volunteer to take over as editor in 2010. It is not a difficult job, so if anyone out there thinks they might be capable of doing it, please get in touch.*

*Malcolm Bergh*



# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Just a short note from me for this issue. We are very busy preparing for the Rocket and Space weekend on the 4th and 5th of July.

As last year there will be a marquee on the concrete slab and in there we will have several new exhibits. Also, if you have not visited the exhibitions this season, there are some worthwhile changes to the Rockets exhibition in L157 with new items and a more chronological display of exhibits. These changes, and particularly the Rockets and Space weekend, take up a lot of time and effort to decide on and to implement, particularly for us non-specialist exhibitors. Any Friends willing to act as guides on the 4th or 5th would be very welcome. Please phone me on 01992 624210.

Attendances at the VE Day Anniversary weekend were very good (best of the year each year) but could have had better weather. Carolyn Grace in her Spitfire was, as usual, greatly enjoyed by all.

Articles and letters for Touchpaper are always welcomed by the Editor so please do keep sending them in. We all like to read them whether they are serious contributions or just entertainment for readers.

John Wright

## **2009 AGM and REUNION**

### **Friday 8th May at the Royal Gunpowder Mills**

At the AGM, all the current Officers and Committee Members were re-elected. After the AGM , the reunion followed, which was attended by 36 friends.

A list of the attendees is given below.

David Manners	John Rowley	Harry Edwards
Peter Honey	John C Wright	Minnie Fenton
Denis Mansell	Richard Penfold	Jean Mansell
Sheila Cooke	Ann Wright	Margaret Lee
Eric Kendrew	Brian Clements	Daphne Clements
Terry Stemman	Sheilagh Owens	David Debenham
David Hewkin	Christine Hewkin	David Keil
Len Stuart	David Steel	Anne Steel
Les Bates	Malcolm Bergh	Jock McDougall
Jack Patient	Norman Elliot	Diane Howse
Jean Church	Dave Sims	Gordon Bromberger
Paul Burnham	John Scrivener	Eileen Scrivener

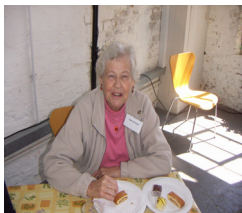
As you can see , the numbers are again down on the year before, but this is to be expected as we unfortunately have a declining membership. Need I mention that we are all getting older !

But if you intend to renew your membership for this year and have neglected to do so, please try and renew before the 15th August as there will be no more reminders.

Malcolm Bergh

## 2009 REUNION

# REUNION PHOTO GALLERY



## Extract from the Archive No. 6

### Benny Hucks and the Waltham Abbey Air Display 1914

*The Grace Spitfire again gave a great display at the VE Event Monday. At least for some the evocative sound of the Rolls Royce Merlin engine aroused memories of when the whole thing was in deadly earnest.*

*However these what are now becoming traditional displays were not the first air displays at Waltham Abbey.*

*In 1914 the Essex Show was held at Waltham Abbey and the crowd thrilled to a demonstration by the celebrated aviator Bentfield 'Benny' Hucks.*

The rise of aviation at the beginning of the 20th century was meteoric and a number of pioneers quickly saw the potential of displays of the exciting new technology as a potential money earner. Either as pilots or managers of pilots many of these went on to found great British aviation companies – de Havilland, Handley Page, A.V. Roe, Blackburn etc. One pilot who established himself as a coming name to be watched was Bentfield C. Hucks, universally known as 'Benny'.



WASC 2083/1  
Bentfield Charles Hucks

Hucks was born in Essex in the hamlet of Bentfield End, near Stansted Mountfitchet ( Stansted Airport ). His parents must have been very fond of their area to name their son after it. His father was a consulting engineer and it is perhaps this background which caused Hucks to take a keen interest in the new technology, to the extent that he took flying lessons and in 1911 he became the first pilot in Essex to obtain a pilot's licence, No. 91. He found a job with Blackburn as a flying instructor. At this time aviation was still a relatively closed world but all this was about to change.



The proprietor of the Daily Mail was closely interested in aviation as a publicity medium and in 1911 he offered the considerable sum of £10000 as first prize in a ‘Circuit of Britain Race’. Twenty pilots took part and it attracted the desired publicity. Hucks competed but did not complete the course. However his name was now nationally known and undeterred in the same year he undertook an extensive promotional tour for Blackburn in the West Country, which attracted very favourable comment in the media and technical press. The popularity of air displays was growing and in 1912 an Easter meeting at Hendon, at which Hucks gave a demonstration, attracted a crowd of 15000.



**WASC 2083/2**

Advert for a B.C.Hucks  
flying demonstration

To capitalise on this he extended his activity to passenger flights and any other which might further aviation – electioneering by air, delivering tobacco by air and lecturing in the winter months.

In 1913 at Hendon in front of a crowd of over 50000 Benny became the first British pilot to ‘loop – the – loop’.

This turned him into a celebrity. In spite of this he apparently remained an affable and even retiring man. In his professional world he was now one of if not the leading aerobatic and test pilots of his day.

In 1914 therefore the organisers of the Essex Show at Waltham Abbey were extremely keen to book Hucks for a demonstration. There was however a hurdle to surmount. The war clouds were gathering and the Authorities had banned all overflying of military installations, which of course included the Royal Gunpowder Factory. But they managed to persuade the Authorities that Benny was not a security threat and he duly flew over the Factory and an enthusiastic crowd at the showground.



Benny served in WWI on the Western Front and latterly in the UK as a flying instructor and he doubtless looked forward to a thriving career in peacetime aviation. But it was not to be. Five days before the end of the War he died in the Spanish flu epidemic and was buried in the military section of Highgate Cemetery.

But he did leave a legacy. At that time the only way of starting aircraft was the inefficient, dangerous and sometimes fatal method of manually swinging the propellor. Benny had applied his mind to the problem and came up with the idea of adapting a Ford Model T car chassis and engine to drive a horizontal shaft which connected to the aero engine and started it and then automatically disengaged. The Air Ministry immediately took up the device and it was supplied to every operational airfield – which is why for many years RAF groundcrew had cause to remember with gratitude the name of Benny Hucks and the Hucks Starter.

**Les Tucker**

---

## **Extract from The Archive No. 5**

### **Waltham Abbey and Gretna - A Close Escape**

The ERDE in the News article in the March 2009 Touchpaper was a reminder of how small and dense newspaper type was. Reports in the newspapers of the controversy in the early 1920's over whether to close the Waltham Abbey Factory or Gretna, held in The Archive, are similarly dense.

The construction of the massive explosives complex at Gretna in 1916 in WWI was one of the great constructional and chemical engineering achievements of the time. – the operation being done at such speed that the first the farmers knew that their fields were being taken over was the arrival of the first construction crew and surveyors

The end of the War brought with it the problem of what to do with an obviously massive explosives over capacity, both private and Governmental. In the private industry there was extensive rationalisation and company mergers, leading ultimately to an organisation which then became the original core of Imperial Chemical Industries – ICI.

# WALTHAM ABBEY AND GRETNA



In the Governmental sector the problem boiled down to whether to keep Waltham Abbey or Gretna. A Committee appointed to consider the issue came down in favour of keeping Gretna and the Cabinet made it clear that they intended to follow the Committee's recommendations. This brought vehement Trade Union opposition and demonstrations in favour of Waltham Abbey, as reported. Amazingly in what must have caused them some embarrassment the Government backed down and Waltham Abbey was saved.

There were plans to turn Gretna into an agricultural fertiliser producer but it all came to nothing and, apart from a relatively small portion kept as an Army stores depot the whole complex was taken down and the plant and machinery auctioned off.

Les Tucker



## John's Wildlife Diary for April 2009.

Hi dear reader, here I am again with some more occasional jottings.

The weather has been very changeable of late, but that hasn't deterred our feathered friends from getting frisky.

The great spotted woodpeckers are drumming like mad, the magpies are displaying with a soft twittering instead of that coarse tchak, tchak, tchak that they normally make and the chiffchaffs are chiffing and chaffing. I heard my first woodpecker of the year yesterday, though I am told that he was calling near 83B's railway shed on Wednesday 8th, so I can't claim to have been the first gunpowder mill volunteer to hear that distinctive call, heralding that spring has indeed sprung.



At the end of March I was lucky enough to get some good views of a male kestrel hunting around the laboratory area on Queen's Mead. How did I know it was a male? Well they have a grey head as apposed to the female's all brown head. Unusually it wasn't hovering, but using the fence, tree supports and building gutters as a perch from which to pounce on it's prey. I couldn't see what it was catching, but I suspect mice or voles, as it was eating it's catch on the

ground before returning to a pole or gutter to start a fresh search.

For the deer, the rut is well and truly over and they are getting rather lethargic as they wait to shed their antlers, while the badgers are looking for new places to build their sett's, hence the two holes that have appeared half way up Queen's Mead on the right hand side of the road. I suspect that this is just an exploratory dig, as there had been no further work there when I last looked.



While out for a walk around Amwell Nature Reserve, I came across a pair of treecreepers. These tiny birds had built their nest behind the loose bark of a dead tree and were busily collecting feathers and material for the nest.

Since we have treecreepers at the mills, and plenty of dead trees, perhaps you may spot a pair too, as loose bark is their preferred site for nest building.

Julie (who looks after the conservation side of things at the mills) has put a form up in the volunteers rest room and would like you all to log any views you get of heron, flying over, fishing or better still nesting.

Well that's my lot for today. Don't forget, if you see anything interesting from a wildlife perspective, let me, Julie or the management team know.

**John Wilson**

**12th April 2009**



# EVENTS PICTURE GALLERY



## 22nd & 23rd April Behind the Scene Railway Project

The 2009 season started with visitors able to have a look at the work carried out by the railway group on the WARGM light railway restoration project.



# EVENTS PICTURE GALLERY



## 2nd,3rd &4th May VE Day Event with Grace Spitfire

The VE day event was again very well attended, although not the best possible weather. For the first time we had a group of Japanese soldier reenactors.





# EVENTS PICTURE GALLERY



## 16th & 17th May Steam and Country Show

I did not manage to get in for this weekend, so photographs courtesy of John Wilson





# EVENTS PICTURE GALLERY



## **23rd,24th &25th May Saxon & Norman Event - Regia Anglorum**

A well attended event with some good weather for a change.



## **“ London shared the pain with disastrous consequences”**

On November 27th 1811, No 4 press house exploded, setting fire to the corning house and reel house as well.

The town of Waltham Abbey was in great danger, as it was thought the magazine had been blown up. Consequently, a man was sent through the streets cautioning the inhabitants to leave their houses as a safety measure.

At Stepney in London, a plate glass mirror was broken by the shock. In Hackney, several panes of glass were forced in and at Blackwall, windows throughout the whole of one street were shattered. Near the New Road, Marylebone, several houses were damaged and nearby labourers, excavating in the park, felt the ground shake whilst they were working. Ships on the river were shaken and people mistook it for an earthquake.

It has been suggested that the current of air at the time might have directed the concussion away from the town.

The shattered remains of one poor man were found three weeks after the explosion. The mutilated remains of the victims were laid reverently in one grave in the Waltham Abbey churchyard.

**Minnie Fenton 14/05/2009**

# The Norman Paul Memorial Water Wheel

A lot of work has been carried out by the friends over the last few months on the upkeep of the water wheel and pond memorial to Norman Paul.



A great deal of the work has been done by Peter Hart, in building a block paving surround for the pond. Here are some photos showing what a magnificent job of work he has done.



---

## TOUCH BYTES

---



### UK Space Conference

On behalf of the RGPM, Dave Sims gave a lecture at the above conference at Charterhouse School on April 4. The subject of the talk was the history of the RGPM and the role of Waltham Abbey in the development of solid rocket motor propellants from 1945 onwards. A large exhibition stand was also provided for the 4 days of the conference and was manned on the Saturday by Len Stuart. Both the talk and the stand were well received by the delegates.

---

**DON'T FORGET**  
**DEADLINE FOR THE SEPTEMBER 2009 ISSUE:**  
**15th August 2009**

# **Rocket and Space Weekend**

On the weekend of the 4th/5th July is the Rocket and Space event. Last year was a great success, with over 780 visitors, even though the weather was poor. We would like this years event to be an even greater success, so please come along if you can.

Not only are there traders, exhibitors and workshops, including rocket building for children, but there are some very interesting talks :-

Would you believe... We put a man on the Moon by Jerry Stone and To the Moon, Mars and Beyond by Dave Shayler are just two of the many talks.

I am sure you won't be disappointed if you do come along.

**Malcolm Bergh**

---

I have had a request from Doug Tasker who worked at PERME and now resides in the USA, if anyone has a contact number for Brian Hammant. Brian was at PERME until its closure and then, as far as we know, moved up North. So far nobody has any more details about his whereabouts. If anyone out there has a telephone number, address or e-mail address, could they let me know and I will pass the information on to Doug Tasker.

**Malcolm Bergh**



# PROFILES

## Malcolm Bergh



**1973 - End of my student  
hippy phase**

No other profiles on offer, so I am afraid that it has to be me this time.



**2009 - Old age  
approaching rapidly**

I joined PERME (ERDE) in 1971 as a sandwich course student for one year and then returned full time in 1973, as an SO with a degree in mathematics.

I worked for Tony Osborn in GC section on North Site, starting off by working with Reg Powell's mass spectrometer section on modelling a new emission source for the spectrometer.

I spent 15 years at PERME in GC section, firstly under Tony Osborn, then John Jenkins. My work was split between Polaris Main Motor Service and running the site main computer system.

In 1988 I could see the writing on the wall and, not wanting a transfer to Fort Halstead, I took up a post with D. Science(Air) in Lacon House. This was a complete change of direction for me as I found myself working with a group of psychologists on recruitment, retention and training for the RAF. The work was very enjoyable and I spent a lot of time at RAF Biggin Hill and then RAF Cranwell, working on the Officer and Aircrew Selection System.

In 1990 we started working on a trial of the American armed forces selection tests, which was great, as it meant lots of trips to the pentagon in Washington to compare results.

But in 1994 the curse of the MOD caught up with me again and

they decided to close down Lacon House. I was offered RAF Innsworth or the Centre for Human Sciences at Farnborough. As my family did not want to move to Gloucestershire, I opted for Farnborough and a 120 mile car journey each day !

The work I was doing was again computer testing systems for officer recruiting, but this time for the army. The army officer selection was carried out at an army base at Westbury in Wiltshire and, having set the system up, I would travel down there most Mondays to observe the recruits being tested.

By 1998 I was finding all the travelling quite a strain, when combined with my rather chaotic personal life (divorce), and so I negotiated an early retirement package and left the MOD. My only regret in leaving when I did was that if I had stayed on a bit longer, I could have been at Westbury to watch Prince William taking the officer selection tests.

Now that I am retired, besides editing Touchpaper, I spent most of my time indulging in my hobbies. Fishing, collecting Science Fiction books, and my favorite hobby, trying to persuade my two sons to leave home and give me some peace and quiet.

**Malcolm Bergh 8/06/2009**

---

### Answers to the March Touchpaper Quiz.

1. Petrel (Stormy Petrel) 2. Milan. 3. Falstaff. 4. Skylark.
5. Skua (skewer) 6. L.A.W. 7. Bloodhound. 8. Swingfire
9. Blowpipe. 10. Sea Slug. 11. Starstreak. 12. Polaris.
13. Rapier. 14. Javelin. 15. Giant Viper. 16. Sidewinder.
17. Saturn. 18. Exocet. 19. Alarm. 20. Sea Wolf.



## JOKE PAGE

### A True Story

During a visit to a mental home, a visitor asked the director what criterion defined whether or not a patient should be admitted.

“Well,” said the director, “we fill up a bath with water, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the patient and ask him or her to empty the bath.”

“Oh, I understand,” said the visitor. “A normal person would use the bucket because it’s bigger than the spoon or teacup.”

“No,” said the director, “a normal person would pull the plug.”  
Do you want a room with or without a view.

---

These are sentences were actually typed by Medical secretaries in NHS [United Kingdom National Health Service) Greater Glasgow.

1. The patient has no previous history of suicides.
2. She has no rigors or shaking chills, but her husband states she was very hot in bed last night.
3. On the second day the knee was better and on the third day it disappeared.
4. The patient is tearful and crying constantly. She also appears to be depressed.
5. The patient has been depressed since she began seeing me in 1993.
6. Discharge status:-     Alive, but without my permission.
7. Between you and me, we ought to be able to get this lady pregnant.
8. She is numb from her toes down.

**Contributions:- Bryan Howard and Dave Sims**

**ROYAL**  
**GUNPOWDER**  
**MILLS**  
WALTHAM ABBEY

‘TOUCHPAPER’©

Published by RGM(WA) Friends Association